

THE COOKING ANIMAL: ECONOMIC MAN AT THE GREAT EXHIBITION

By Paul Young

Soyer's Symposium

WHEN CALLED UPON TO HOST a banquet celebrating the forthcoming Great Exhibition of 1851, the world's first display of international industry, the Mayor of York turned to the period's most renowned chef for the catering. The Frenchman Alexis Soyer, who had recently resigned from his position at the Reform Club in Pall Mall, had made a name for himself in Britain through a combination of extravagant culinary endeavours and popular household cookery books. The banquet at York was an important occasion; joining Prince Albert, Queen Victoria's Consort, was a long list of national luminaries from Victorian high society and the political world. Soyer did not disappoint the Mayor, or his guests. The *Times* commented that amongst the vast array of international cuisines on offer was featured "one dish, to which turtles, ortolans, and other rich denizens of land and sea had contributed, [which] cost not less than 100*l.*" The paper noted with satisfaction that the feast was consumed before an "emblematical device representing Britannia in her conventional attire receiving the industrial products of Europe, Asia, Africa, and America" ("The Banquet at York" 5). That this emblem provided the backdrop to such cosmopolitan fare was salient: it spoke to the way in which the production and consumption of food would become a crucial motif in the positive representation of globalisation as it was understood at the Exhibition; it also highlighted the important role that the Victorian metropolis would fulfil in the realisation of this new world order. Certainly, the internationalist bent of Soyer's cooking seemed entirely appropriate to the luminaries gathered at the York banquet, and it was no doubt with the French chef's culinary scope in their minds as well as their stomachs that the Exhibition's organisers invited Soyer to submit a tender to provide refreshments at the display itself (Soyer 197).

Soyer, however, refused the offer. The Royal Commission had laid down particular stipulations concerning the nature of consumables to be served within the Palace, including a ban on alcohol. "It would be inconsistent with the nature of the Exhibition," the Commission pronounced, "to allow the building to assume the character of an hotel, tavern, or dining-rooms" (J. Davis 100). Seemingly affronted by these restrictions, the entrepreneurial chef had, in any case, spotted an alternative opportunity to use his skill and fame to capitalize on the event. Working with the young artist and writer George Augustus Sala, Soyer took over Gore House, previously the salon of the notoriously extravagant Countess Blessington and conveniently situated just opposite the Crystal Palace. With the aim of profiting

from the vast numbers of visitors predicted to attend the Palace, he established there an enormous restaurant, capable of seating some 1,500 guests at a time and of providing them with an unparalleled culinary experience. The grandiose name of the restaurant, "Soyer's International Exhibition, The Gastronomic Symposium of All Nations," made it clear that here was a location intended to rival the Great Exhibition, not simply furnish a respite from it.¹

In terms of attracting patrons, the venture was a success, drawing over 1000 visitors a day, including such heavyweight figures as the Duke of Wellington and Benjamin Disraeli. However, whilst the Symposium ran for five months, shutting just after the Great Exhibition itself, it was poorly administered and lost money from day one. Difficulties in obtaining a music licence so that its rowdier guests could continue their revelries into the night led the restaurant to close with debts of about £7,000 (Soyer 235, 263). Set against the money-making Exhibition, which attracted more than six million visitors, Soyer's Symposium seems little more than an interesting historical footnote – a failed palace of gluttony and pleasure to be contrasted with the more serious and successful Crystal Palace. But the relationship between the Symposium and the Exhibition is more complex. What the chef promised in the advertising material he produced for the restaurant was a deliberate and exuberant culinary parody of the Great Exhibition, and what lives beyond the balance sheets of the two events is the way in which Soyer's vision cast a shadow over the display's authoritative and compelling account of the world.

This essay concerns itself with the way in which food and cooking played a significant illustrative role in the understanding of globalisation that lay at the heart of the Great Exhibition. In line with free trade's supposed capacity to unite the nations of the world in peaceful and progressive harmony, the display of raw materials, machinery, manufactures, and fine art laid out within Joseph Paxton's purpose-built Crystal Palace was held to give visual form to an economically interdependent global community. This community, and the story it allowed to be generated about the world, depended upon an abstracted conceptualisation of *Homo Economicus*, or Economic Man: the notion that humanity, in all its various types, was constitutionally inclined to exchange was conflated with the idea that diverse peoples would exchange according to the laws of comparative advantage, which in turn led to the conviction that they would exchange, in competitive but mutually beneficial interactions, a body of goods which were relevant to their everyday lives.² A prime concern of the Exhibition, then, was not simply to emphasise the industrial profusion and diversity of all nations, but also to indicate the commercial symmetry to which this richness and difference gave rise, thus to articulate the advantages it would bring to all peoples. And here cosmopolitanism and cooking came together.

At first glance, the catalogue drawn up by Soyer to advertise the Symposium bears witness to this culinary internationalism and the wider story it could be seen to tell. However, it offers one substantive difference. Whilst at the Palace, it was things which were held to give metonymic form to the potential interdependency of the peoples and nations of the world, Soyer claimed that his gastronomic undertaking would place on show peoples and their products. The restaurant, proclaimed the catalogue, would "triumph over geographical limits" and gather together, "from all quarters of the globe, civilized or uncivilized . . . universal humanity." "Cosmopolitan customers," it continued, "should demand cosmopolitan cooking" (Soyer 200). So far so good with regard to the celebratory account of the world with which the Exhibition was associated. However, things took a turn for the worse when Soyer expanded his definition of cosmopolitan cooking to include an analysis of consumption. The catalogue promised that the visitor to the Symposium might well find her or himself

dining opposite “grave and lively Frenchmen, expatiating over their potages and fricandeux; phlegmatic Turks, discussing pillaf and hachis; mercurial Persians, enjoying their sherbert.” The list went on; there would be Spaniards with olla podrida, Americans with Johnnycakes, Russians with caviar, Cossacks with train oil, and Chinese with stewed dog. There might even be New Zealanders – but the catalogue recanted: “no, not New Zealanders, for who could form any idea of the horror and dismay which would be caused by some ebony-skinned and boomeranged chieftain demanding ‘baked young woman’ for two, and a ‘cold boiled missionary’ to follow?” (201).

In order to reflect further upon the significance of this list, we can turn to the discourse of political economy. Political economy from Adam Smith to J. S. Mill generated something of a problem: on the one hand, it tended to conceive of Economic Man as representing “man as such, that is, universal human nature”; on the other, it proposed “a particular kind of man, the product of a particular economic class and race at a particular moment in global market relations” (Gagnier 19). Soyer’s representation of the dining habits of his international guests exposed precisely this tension between universality and particularity at the heart of political economical discourse, opening up a gap between cosmopolitan rhetoric and the purported reality of national specificity. Set against the abstracted and idealised community of free trade economics in which all peoples exchanged all things, this was a vision of human life which saw national populations locked within patterns of production and consumption influenced by particular historical, cultural, and “racial” paradigms. Far from bolstering a panegyric to globalisation, then, Soyer had succeeded in using food to undermine the validity of the Exhibition’s imagined community. And such a destabilising depiction of international culinary activity did not stop at the Symposium.

Whilst this essay addresses the way in which food was mobilised by Exhibition commentary as a commercial marker of economic integration and globalised harmony, then, it also explores the way in which a body of literary and visual culture materials inspired by the event deployed food in order to counter such a vision. More than registering aspects of human difference which were problematic to a simplistic conception of capitalism, these works signalled fundamental incongruities which refused economic rationalisation. Such representations reveal the reductive nature of the economic discourse which sustained a Victorian understanding of globalisation. At the same time, however, a hegemonic form of globalisation continued apace in the years that followed the Great Exhibition, and these representations also make clear that the display was seen to promote a human hierarchy that served to justify the various imperial policies pursued by European powers as they opened up the non-European world to penetration by industrial capitalism.³ Although the depiction of international food and consumption practices inspired by the display can be said to have undermined the Exhibition’s grand narrative, it can also be held to have legitimised and encouraged the coercion, violence, and suffering that globalisation occasioned. Thus this article contributes to the cultural history of global hunger by taking up Jean Dreze’s and Amartya Sen’s exhortation in *The Political Economy of Hunger* to link the economic sphere with its political, social, and cultural influences (3).

The Cookery of All Nations

IN A LECTURE GIVEN after the Crystal Palace had closed, John Lindley, Professor of Botany at University College London, spoke on “Substances Used as Food, Illustrated by the Great Exhibition.” Lindley estimated that in addressing this subject, some seven to eight thousand

objects from the display attracted his notice, although he also stressed that “new kinds of food are not to be expected” (211, 242). This emphasis on the finite nature of the earth’s material resources played up the idea of the Palace as a cartographic endeavour which revealed the contents, and not just the outline, of the world’s geography. What the Palace opened up, then, was a global prospect through which to locate international commodities. Other writers inculcated similar principles of mapping in encouraging attendance at the exposition. Questioning whether its readers had ever “pondered upon the strange productions of other climes” and playing up the display’s comprehensive scope, an article from the first series of John Cassell’s *Illustrated Exhibitor* invited its readers to visit the Palace. Here, it suggested, the Exhibition-goer would find all such productions “made visible, in root, and seed, and blossom, and fruit, and work of men’s hands” (3). Underlining the fact that food was a commodity well suited to illustrate the increasingly international character of commercial interaction, the article continued by linking the Exhibition to the culinary character of Victorian life: “Do we care to know how the familiar luxuries of our homesteads look in their native guise? here are tea, and coffee, and cocoa, and ginger, and sugar, and rice, and wheat, and spices, and tobacco, as they grew in their country’s soil” (3).

As well as their international provenance, what linked such goods was their durability. To the dismay of the Swiss, who wished to show a collection of cheeses, the Palace prohibited the display of perishable goods. This meant that the vast majority of foodstuffs on display were raw materials, although Exhibition-goers could expect some notable exceptions. In drawing its readers’ attention to one such “gastronomic wonder,” the *Times* warned Soyer to “beware his culinary honours, for a pie of immense size, 4 feet long, 2^{1/2} wide, and 1 foot deep, has arrived at the Crystal Palace from Holland” (“The Great Exhibition – We Are Glad to Hear” 5). The article did not explain how the Dutch expected to prevent this exhibit from going off. Less risky were the preserved goods – including canned meats – on display. These goods, typically acclaimed in terms of technological progress and the travel possibilities they afforded, could also provoke wonder. The *Illustrated Exhibitor* advised its readers of something which “appears at first sight a ludicrous offering to the world’s fair” (156). The sight in question was a picture of a whole preserved pig, on display from Ireland. Such a “novel specimen,” advised the article, should be regarded “not in its funniness, but in its utilitarianism” (156). Having warned against inappropriate reaction, the article noted the useful nature of the product and concluded that “the Crystal Palace would hardly have been complete without it” (156). The fact that such sustenance would have been particularly useful – and certainly not funny – to the starving inhabitants of the pig’s famine-stricken and decimated country of origin was not allowed to interfere with this satisfied appraisal of its representative significance.

With such traces of the material conditions of production safely out of sight, commentators could concentrate with greedy relish upon the profusion and variety which lay before them. “Substances Used As Food” appeared in *Tallis’s History and Description of the Crystal Palace*, one of several unofficial guides published during the Exhibition’s run. The article began by “inviting the attention of our readers to the consideration of Food.” Here it was careful to explain its own position:

we confess we are no disciples of,
 – Those budge doctors of the Stoic fur,
 Who fetch their precepts from the Cynic tub,
 Praising the lean and shallow abstinence. (82)

The piece went on to cite much of Comus's "Nature's bounties" speech, claiming that the eponymous character – "a rather questionable authority, our adversaries may suggest" – voiced Milton's own sentiments. Contending, in any case, that the "truth is valuable, from whatever source it may proceed," it concluded by repeating the arguments of the "jolly reveller": "Let us, then, open our eyes and admire the vast fertility of nature, and contemplate with thankfulness the various means of food and subsistence that the bounteous hand of Providence has provided for the benefit of mankind" (83). As the article itself was aware, this was not the most sophisticated of polemics; it simply set up a rather simplified opposition between luxury and leanness, abundance and abstinence, and argued that the mobilisation of the earth's resources fell in line with providential design. A more sensitive reading of Milton's work might have drawn upon the poem's observation that what was wrong with the world was not the increased production of material wealth, but rather its uneven distribution.⁴

Considering the Exhibition in its relation to the possible future of Europe and the world, the clergyman Thomas Binney adopted precisely this line of reasoning. Casting his eye around the Crystal Palace, Binney conceded that material abundance might well "breed luxury, foster pride, promote corruption, and lead ultimately to national degradation and decay" (37). But this was not, he insisted, its necessary effect. "Riches, prosperity, commerce, manufactures, and everything else that adorns life" could be attributed to the "beneficence of God" (37). In an apparent echo of Comus, Binney invoked the "language of Moses to the chosen people":

The Lord God bringeth thee into a good land; a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills: a land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig-trees, and pomegranates; a land of olive-oil and honey; a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack anything in it. (38)

However, the essayist was careful to qualify this celebration of wealth. Earlier, he had commented upon a commercial symmetry which shaped the global distribution of industrial resources: "It was God who appropriated to different climes their diversified productions . . . who conferred on the nations different talents and different tastes; – who made exchange of productions a mutual want, necessity or convenience; – and who thus established the law of commercial intercourse" (29). The point was that if the world worked together, everyone could enjoy all this difference.

What Binney purported to have perceived at the Crystal Palace, then, was a providentially-inspired international division of labour, an organic structure of relations which allowed for the profitable orchestration of the climatic, industrial, and social differences characteristic of the various nations and peoples of the world. And it did so on the basis of mutual consent. Whilst the wants of the world were held to be universal, the geographical capacity of different terrains and peoples to meet these wants through rational and consensual exchange was variegated. Understood in terms of economic policy, this state of affairs demanded the institution of free trade throughout the world. Only through "free and universal intercourse," Binney alleged, would there emerge a system of interdependency to ensure that "the abundance and blessings of favoured regions may become the common property of all" (39–40).

This inclusive and consensual structure of relations underpinned the Great Exhibition, feeding into a wealth of official and unofficial commentary about the display. What bound such commentary together was the insistence that the peoples of the world were

capitalist by inclination and were thus predisposed to act in accordance with geographically-determined patterns of comparative advantage. Moreover, this self-interested mode of being was presented as a philanthropic desire to see different industrial talents mobilised rationally. Thus William Felkin, discussing the way in which the Exhibition's lesson would be brought to bear upon labour and commerce in the world beyond the Palace's walls, stated:

Different as are the character, dispositions, and endowments of the Chinese, and the Anglo-Saxon, the Hindoo, and the Hottentot, more so indeed than the diversified productions of the soil they cultivate and inhabit, it needs but mutual good will to render them helpers of each other, by useful labours and arts. (29)

And as Binney would make manifest, food lent itself to this conception of unity writ through ecological diversity and multiculturalism, a vision of a world's population brought together in order to enjoy productive and fruitful lives.

That said, however, the above representations tended towards the notion of the commodity as something which grew, rather than was worked upon; in other words, they could be seen to evince an order which was autochthonous but not industrial. Hence the *Illustrated Exhibitor's* demand for its readers to consider foodstuffs "as they grew in their country's soil," or the Miltonic concern with "Nature's bounties," or Binney's Mosaic characterisation of the earth's material resources in terms of terrain and not industry. If this tendency sat comfortably with the idea that God intended humankind to trade without restriction, it jarred somewhat with any attempt to characterise free trade's new world order with regard to distinctions unconnected with ecology.

A proposal by *Punch*, published in 1850, and drawing upon the internationalist significance of Soyer's brand of cosmopolitan cuisine, rendered this order via an explicit attention to culture as well as soil. Anticipating the forthcoming Exhibition, "The Cookery of All Nations" noted that there could be "no objection" to the display in the Palace "of culinary specimens." This collection, it suggested, would demonstrate the importance and advantages of a culinary division of labour: "Let France, then, send her countless dishes, Italy her cream, Spain her olla-podrida, Russia her caviare, Turkey her kiebobs, India her curry, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales their stew haggis and rabbit, whilst English roast beef shall compete with the cookery of the world" (100). Even though the Exhibition itself would not institute at a culinary level such a complex display of commodities and nations, *Punch* was quick to discern that it was just this stylised vision of comparative advantage realised through an international division of labour and formulated in micro- rather than macro-economic terms which would generate and sustain the display's understanding of globalisation. If this understanding posited a reductive view of the nation-state, it is important to note that it sprang from a still more simplistic idealisation of Homo Economicus, the figure which furnished the display with its cosmopolitan hero.

Man in the Aggregate

WHILST POLITICAL PRAGMATISM PREVENTED the Exhibition's organisers and official literature from making explicit mention of free trade, it is clear that the logic of free-trade capitalism, specifically as it was understood with regard to an international division of labour, fed in at a foundational level to the representation of the event.⁵ A pan-European

move towards free trade was gathering pace by the mid-nineteenth century. But it was Britain, following Robert Peel’s 1846 repeal of the Corn Laws, which stood alone as the world’s only nation committed to commercial liberalisation, in stated principle if not always in practice.⁶ This placed a burden on the nation’s shoulders. Many Victorians considered Britain’s responsibility for the realisation of international interdependency to be paramount, and they saw the Great Exhibition as playing a major role in bringing the order to fruition. If this move towards a new world order was associated with the Victorians, though, it was not cast as a motivated Victorian endeavour. Free trade constituted a *Pax Humana*, not a *Pax Britannica*, in this sense. Certainly this was the view taken by the *Times* in an editorial concerning the forthcoming Exhibition. Underscoring both the free trade politics of the display and the Victorians’ position in the vanguard of commercial policy, the paper declared that it was “an idea as new as it was felicitous to consider all mankind as one, and to transform the metropolis of Britain into the hospitable rendezvous of the world” (“The Prince Consort” 4).

That it was possible to “consider all mankind as one” in this manner rested on an anthropological idealisation of humankind’s fundamental propensity to exchange, one derived from the universalist imperative that characterised the nineteenth-century discourse of political economy. In 1834, Charles Knight’s *Penny Cyclopaedia* defined “Anthropology” as a consideration of “man as a citizen of the world,” adding that the discipline had “nothing properly to do with the varieties of the human race” (97). For many Victorian commentators, the science of political economy, with its leading man *Homo Economicus*, furnished a formal mode of thought which fell squarely in line with such an anthropological endeavour. What legitimised an international division of labour as it was explicated by Exhibition commentary, then, was not simply humanity’s capacity to exchange, but also its capacity to exchange those articles which, in the economic parlance of the day, were “necessary, useful, or agreeable to man” (McCulloch 1). As opposed to later economic thinking, early to mid-Victorian economic discourse had a marked tendency to propose Economic Man as a transnational, cross-cultural character. Such a tendency bore with it a sociological emphasis which privileged, in general terms, the human body and downplayed the notion that consumer demand might change over space and time.⁷ Following Smith, whose *Wealth of Nations* (1776) was commonly understood by the Victorians as international free trade’s founding text, J. R. McCulloch’s *The Principles of Political Economy* (1825) was explicit in defending the expansive nature of this category; political economy, he contended, dealt with “man in the aggregate . . . with the passions and propensities which actuate the bulk of the human race” and not with “the peculiarities of particular persons” (15).

The universality of free trade’s economic order was in opposition to other ideas about human difference which were taking shape during the period. Taking 1850 as its point of departure (although she is careful to draw links with earlier lines of thinking), Christine Bolt notes in *Victorian Attitudes to Race* that anthropology tended to study both physical features and cultural characteristics. Bolt sets out that within the context of ever more significant debates staged between polygenists and monogenists over humanity’s origins, anthropological thought increasingly explicated “race” – as a marker of both physical and cultural traits – in essentialist and antagonistic terms. Thus polygenists looked to linguistics as well as physiology as a means of establishing racial hierarchies, taxonomies which were used in order to argue for racial exclusivity, as well as superiority (9–16). Set against the rise of increasingly authoritative and popular polygenetic accounts of the world, the mid-nineteenth-century argument for free trade, as evidenced by Exhibition commentary, lent

itself to a monogenetic and thus religiously orthodox mode of thought. Notably, this argument disputed the idea of fundamental human difference at the level of the mind as well as the body. Hence, the “family of man” associated with the development of free trade was figured physiologically, with a marked emphasis upon shared blood and common somatic needs. At the same time, if philology could propose that distinct groups of humanity originated from different linguistic backgrounds, then political economical thought could put forward exchange as a cultural universal, a type of language which bound all peoples together.

The anthropological fantasy behind the expansive global order that the Exhibition was seen to simultaneously plot and celebrate came to the fore in an article from Cassell’s *Illustrated Exhibitor*. The article, which followed the close of the display, began by pondering how best to think of humanity in a collective sense: “Man has been defined ‘a speaking animal,’ a ‘cooking animal;’ he might also be defined a ‘tilling animal,’ a ‘dressing animal,’ a ‘bartering animal,’ a ‘business animal,’ a ‘progressive animal,’ and so forth” (“Money as an Agent of Civilisation” 410). The article’s commitment to reflect on and elaborate the themes and philosophies of the Exhibition meant that in the hunt for a universal, one which incorporated man “even in his rudest state,” the writer was inevitably drawn to bartering. Emphasising that man did not rely upon instinct, the piece cast “the exchange of commodities” as “the work of the reasoning faculty.” Trade, it continued, “is beyond the comprehension of the wisest monkey; neither the bee, the beaver, the dog, nor the horse, goes to market” (410). What the article did not clarify, however, was the nature of the commodities that man exchanged once he arrived at market, and what demands emphasis in light of this account of nineteenth-century economic discourse is just how pertinent food was to this understanding of human life.

It was certainly no accident, then, that *The Crystal Palace and Its Contents*, a journal which appeared weekly between October 1851 and March 1852, settled on the stomach as the site from which to extrapolate the economics of existence. Following Adam Smith’s observation that after food, “clothing and lodging are the two great wants of mankind” (266), “Articles of Food” listed food, clothing, and habitation as the three “great wants of man,” labelling food as the “most essential” of these demands (106).⁸ If, for Oscar Wilde, the cigarette was the perfect commodity because it left one unsatisfied, for Exhibition commentators, food was the perfect commodity because it satisfied everybody. As Binney and *Punch* registered, then, the notion of man as a cooking as well as a bartering animal provided a compelling illustrative motif; it conceived of Homo Economicus as a genuinely global phenomenon, in terms of somatic and cultural similitude, at the same time as recognising those forms of difference in human life upon which free trade could capitalise.

Culinary Compensation?

WITH THE IDEA OF ECONOMIC Man and its concomitant understanding of exchange as a universal medium and the commodity as a universal form underlying the barriers which nationhood (and race) otherwise established, the Crystal Palace was held to have realised a story about the world which the world would understand. Prior to the opening of the Great Exhibition, commentators were preoccupied with the notion that London would be inundated with foreigners during the spring and summer of 1851. The *Times* suggested that leaving aside British visitors to the capital, it would be no “exaggeration to say that from the whole surface of the habitable globe . . . a million of persons will be attracted to London” (“There

is Much Speculation" 4). For one prize-winning essayist, this international audience was to serve as a reminder of a shared genetic ancestry and collective linguistic capacity. Playing up humanity's common stock, J. C. Whish remarked that the Exhibition brought home to the Victorian metropolis the fact that free trade would prove "to our race a kind of compensation for the Tower of Babel" (8). According to Biblical record, humankind's last attempt to come together on such a grand scale had manifested itself in the presumption of Babel, God's wrath, and subsequent linguistic confusion and tribal heterogeneity. Commercial interdependency allowed humanity to overcome if not overturn this punishment, profiting as a result of, rather than in spite of, tribal differences. Whish declared that the Palace succeeded in making it apparent that a propensity to exchange those items found to be universally desirable furnished a means by which all peoples could, in effect, "speak the same thing" (7).

Under the epigraph "You must translate, 'tis fit we understand," *Punch* disputed the catholic character of the narrative with which the display was associated, although it did so in a manner which seemed only to underscore its legitimacy. In anticipation of a foreign influx, and describing 1851 as "the polyglot season in history," the journal remarked that London's shopkeepers were learning as many languages as they could in order to boost trade. But this was not enough. The same merchants were also endeavouring to translate their goods for the benefit of foreign visitors: "The sausage merchants are preparing to get their German sausages translated into French, and a dealer in sweet-stuff intends bringing out an English and Italian version of his Spanish liquorice. French rolls are to be done into Dutch; the Dutch ovens are to be translated into French" ("You Must Translate" 126). Of course, the genius of the Exhibition, and international commerce more generally, lay in the fact that translation was rendered unnecessary; trade dealt with the thing and not the word. And of all things, this truth could be made clear through food. Confident in a conception of the commodity wrapped up with the Mosaic language of olive oil and honey, Binney was convinced that the goods displayed were distinguished by "a common voice," "a language of their own – but which all the different national workers shall alike understand. Everything will speak of oneness, brotherhood – the same nature, the same faculties" (97). That London in 1851 was understood as a universally "hospitable rendez-vous" was a result of the Victorian realisation that the peoples of the world could comprehend one another in this way, both at the Exhibition and beyond. In this view, at least, *Homo Economicus* was no abstracted idealisation, but a real figure of flesh and blood, hailing from all quarters of the globe, and alive and well in the Crystal Palace. As Soyer had demonstrated, however, there was another way of looking at things, one which pushed to the fore nationally exclusive particularity at the expense of mutually beneficial universality.

In its article "Too Many Cooks," *Punch* warned that the forthcoming Exhibition "will let loose upon us the manners and cookeries of too many men." A "hideous confusion of principles . . . a meaningless syncreticism of opposite doctrines, and incompatible aims" would be the inevitable result, the journal continued (21). Far from compensating Babel, in line with the structure of relations the journal had set out in "The Cookery of All Nations," this understanding of the Crystal Palace proposed an event which would confirm rather than compensate the divisions and incongruities which Babel had put in place. In fleshing out the inhabitants of the world as consumers driven by nationally specific desires – desires which led them to stick to what they knew best – other representations of international culinary habits likewise exposed the inadequacies of Economic Man as a universal. Disputing an idealisation of commercial reciprocity born of capitalist rationale and mutual comprehension, such forms

of culinary contextualisation proposed instead that the commodity was historically and culturally rooted and that consumption practices of the world's peoples were accordingly mediated.⁹ The contention that national dishes inspired national exclusivity can thus be read with regard to a Victorian anxiety that other countries might not follow Britain's adoption of free trade, preferring instead to support domestic industry over foreign trade. But more than this, what stands out about the following material is the introduction of racialised markers of the fundamental, non-negotiable disparity between different human groups. Having outlined the way in which Man the cooking animal served in somatic and cultural terms to structure an organic resolution of difference, I will now turn to the way in which the same anthropological mode of categorisation could be understood with regard to culturally and biologically enforced discrepancies, dividing lines which were difficult, if not impossible, to bridge.

Chacun a Son Goût

1851: OR, THE ADVENTURES OF Mr. and Mrs. Sandboys, Henry Mayhew and George Cruikshank's novel about the Great Exhibition, has as its frontispiece an illustration by Cruikshank of a globe crowned by the Crystal Palace and swarming with a mass of peoples making their way to the display. Beneath the picture is the caption "All the World Going to See the Great Exhibition of 1851," and accompanying this inscription is Mayhew's observation that the Palace would "attract the sight-seers of all the world – the sight-seers who make up nine-tenths of the human family" (1). The inscription and accompanying text, however, only tell part of the story. The alien, exotic nature of the crowd pictured by Cruikshank reflected a Victorian desire to see the sights provided by the world's populace. Such sights included what they might eat. As well as detailing with excitement the preparations of the Exhibition's more "colourful" guests (including the Hottentot Venus, a "Cingalese" polished "up like a boot," and a "Yemassee" with his cheeks painted blue "with the *rouge* of the backwoods"), Mayhew's novel looked forward to the fare they might consume (1). Apparently Mayhew had not heard of Soyer's reluctance to serve cannibals. Soyer's "restaurant of all nations," *1851* declared, would be serving foods ranging from "pickled whelks to nightingales' tongues – from the rats *à la Tartare* of the Chinese to the 'turkey and truffles' of the Parisian gourmand – from the 'long sixes, *au naturel*' of the Russian, to the 'Stewed Missionary of the Marquesas,' or the 'cold roast Bishop' of New Zealand" (2). What is significant to note then – and what Soyer deployed as a clever promotional ploy – was the excitement, not to say the frisson, which was generated by the idea that the Great Exhibition would provide the opportunity to observe the world at mealtime.

In the event, metropolitan Victorians were disappointed. Despite the excitement generated in the build up to the display's opening, forecasts concerning the number of foreigners who would attend the Great Exhibition proved to be wildly optimistic.¹⁰ However, whilst foreigners, particularly exotic foreigners, were relatively thin on the ground in the capital, what emerged in 1851 was a Victorian fascination with human alterity – a fascination which the Great Exhibition promoted rather than simply reflected and which found form in a body of literary and visual representations of foreigners and their foods.

Characteristic of such representations of food and consumption, and in line with the dynamic present in Soyer's catalogue, was the strong suggestion that in matters culinary it was a case of to each his own taste.¹¹ Thus it was that in H. Sutherland Edwards's fictional

account of a Chinese visit to the Exhibition, it is the Victorians’ culinary peculiarity which has reached the ears of China’s despotic Emperor. Punishing a criminal by sending him to London, ironically labelled the capital of the English “barbarians,” the Emperor declares:

When I send one in barbarous countries to pine,
It’s because he’s not fit to be strangled in mine.
But to England, the soil of the gloomy and sad,
Where the climate and cookery are equally bad, -
To England, a land of perpetual fog,
Where the dog-fanciers even don’t fancy roast dog;
Where the bird-nests are cared for by none but the boys,
Who instead of devouring them treat them as toys. (8)

The subtitle to Edwards’s work reads, “Wherein the opinion of China is shown as not corresponding at all with our own.” Emphasising this difference of culinary opinion, at the same time as making manifest the limits which governed the Victorian taste for a globalised multiculturalism, Lindley’s lecture on food had raised the subject of “sea-slugs, and birds’ nests, and other curious matters” only to dismiss them: “[These are questions] which, whatever may be their value, belong to countries so far removed from us that we cannot feel their importance” (212).

As both Edwards and Lindley made clear, albeit in different ways, Chinese cuisine signified a divide beyond which it was difficult and undesirable to cross. And this was not simply a matter of cultural relativity. Explicit in the former, if only implicit in the latter text, was the sense of the barbarians beyond the pale, of backward, underdeveloped peoples not only doing things differently but doing them incorrectly. This sense was heightened when, as the Exhibition had promised to do, the non-Western (and not simply Eastern) barbarian was invited into the civilised metropolis.

In its collected volume of issues running from January to June 1851, *Punch* gave over its opening pages to a series of cartoons and illustrated texts anticipating the forthcoming display. It provided the journal with the opportunity to develop a theme of human difference and to do so in particular with relation to the figure of the “savage.” In “Refreshments at the Great Exhibition of 1851,” *Punch* condemned the official arrangements for the provision of food at the Palace. “As we are expecting visitors from all nations,” the journal stated, “we may look for a sprinkling of Red Men, to whom it would be a mockery to offer bread and butter, ginger-beer, or even SOYER’S Nectar” (33). The procurement of a set of diversely proportioned kangaroos, “to suit the appetites, more or less moderate, of the Indian epicure,” was the journal’s somewhat ambitious solution for feeding Native American guests (33). “London Dining Rooms” features Chinese characters ordering bird’s nest, rat pie, and dog. “The Haycocks in 1851” depicts a family’s trip to the Palace, which is ruined by a series of misbehaving foreigners, a disastrous adventure which reaches its peak with a tribe of American Indians who, tired of eating dog, prepare to scalp a kitchen boy. Thomas Onwhyn’s *Mr and Mrs Brown’s Visit to London to See the Great Exhibition of All Nations* stages another fictional account of a family trip to the Palace. Here it is the Brown’s son who finds himself in danger. One illustration depicts a group of open-mouthed Negroes exhibiting “their ivories to Little Johnny,” whilst another renders this savage threat in still clearer terms, as a hungry and knife-wielding triumvirate from the Cannibal Islands encountered in a restaurant offer

a price for the Brown's unfortunate Johnny (Auerbach 173–75). It was difficult to imagine such characters forming part of free trade's new world order.

"Anthropology," Charles Knight's *Cyclopaedia* had insisted, was driven by an apparently catholic imperative. However, the entry as recorded towards the beginning of this essay is misleading. Following on from its acclaim for the discipline's cosmopolitan scope, the *Cyclopaedia* added that "Anthropology" did not "invade the secluded circle of what is called the great world, the individuals of which are too near each other, and too remote from the rest of their species, to be observed with advantage" (97). Immediately beneath this entry, appropriately enough, is the entry "Anthropophagi," with the accompanying instruction, "see cannibals" (97). Of all the representations of cooking animals produced by Exhibition literature, it was the cannibal which seemed to do the most to upset the inclusive new world order which the Great Exhibition announced. Driven by a somatic imperative perversely at odds with that of the Palace's abstract hero, an instinct which underlay and overrode any propensity to exchange, the tastes of the man-eater refused the logic of Economic Man. Yet whilst the figure of the cannibal fleshed out most dramatically such a refusal, other representations of "colourful" peoples associated with the world's "secluded circle" were not far behind. If commentators showed the aesthetic sensibilities of the French, Spanish, or Americans to be nationally specific, their appetites were not at odds with the Victorians' to the same extent, or even in the same way, as were those of the American Indian, Chinese, or New Zealanders.

The above representations of food and consumption did more than simply play up the notion of human difference at the expense of an imagined and abstracted internationalist community. Rather, they put forward a divisive and hierarchical taxonomy which set at odds the civilised and the barbarian, the West and the East, and the cook and the cannibal.¹² In the brightening light of racialised arguments concerning the origins and capacities of humankind, such representations did little to assuage the Victorian troubled by the proposal that it was "felicitous to consider all mankind as one" ("The Prince Consort" 4). The pitfalls and dangers of such cosmopolitan idealisation were certainly not lost upon George Augustus Sala.

Ever aware of the potential for food to signal racial otherness, as well as national parochialism, Sala published in 1850 a panoramic cartoon strip entitled *The Great Exhibition: 'Wot Is to Be.'* Produced under the provocative mandate "Vates Secundus for the Committee of the Society for Keeping Things in their Places," the strip featured, amongst other things, a sausage-wielding German, a haggis-bearing Scotsman, and New Zealanders proudly displaying "cold boiled missionary" and "emigrant soup."¹³ Playing up the theme of national incongruity on a far grander scale, however, was the fresco which Sala painted at Soyer's Symposium. In what was perhaps a nod to the confusion he discerned underlying free trade's imagined community, Soyer detailed with some glee the fact that "Geography, time, place, and locality had been set at defiance in this extraordinary *pêle-mêle*" (Soyer 205). It depicted, amongst other things, "an incongruous medley of grotesque and monstrous-headed figures," including Esquimaux, American Indians, and other "savage" forms (208). But the hordes of barbarians could be seen as homogenous rather than heterogeneous. What structured an explicit juxtaposition was the fact that amongst this array of coloured oddities were featured the white, civilised forms of British society. Notably, these included Richard Cobden and John Bright, leaders of the Manchester School and the Victorian face of populist free trade economics. Sala's work thus brought to the fore the question which so much Exhibition

commentary, including Soyer’s catalogue, had raised: before Britain argued for an inclusive world order, might it not prove useful to survey global peoples, and not simply their industrial products? Certain members of Cobden’s and Bright’s supposed “brethren” might, in Knight’s words, “be too far removed from the rest of their species, to be observed with advantage” (97).¹⁴

Feast and Famine

WHILST SALA’S FRESCO ENCAPSULATES the way in which portrayals of racialised human difference could effectively kill off the Exhibition’s cosmopolitan hero, this paper cannot conclude here. Alterity at the Crystal Palace rendered problematic the consensual and pacific story that Economic Man had enabled the Victorians to spin about the process of globalisation, but it did not undermine the process itself. And if Anthropology, at least as Knight elaborated it, did not “invade the secluded circle of what is known as the great world,” industrial capitalism did, a fact to which goods garnered from all four quarters of the globe within the Crystal Palace bore witness. Thus Marx and Engels would note: “This exhibition is a striking proof of the concentrated power with which modern large-scale industry is everywhere demolishing national barriers and increasingly blurring local peculiarities of production, society and national character among all peoples” (“Review: May-October 1850”).¹⁵ They expanded upon the way this power was exerted elsewhere, in a manner which drew attention to its exploitative agenda and violent implications even as it uncritically rehearsed the Eurocentric taxonomy of human life with which it was bound.

For “The Communist Manifesto,” it was the “need of a constantly expanding market for its products,” as well as supplies of raw materials, which chased “the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe” (224). It was not a process characterised by peace and consensus.¹⁶ Driven by the requirement to extend markets and fully exploit the potential for economic growth afforded by manufacturing and communication technologies, “civilized nations” were transforming the way the world worked. And this transformation was loaded in the favour of the powerful; it was a programme which positioned terrains and peoples as commercial satellites to metropolitan centres, producing raw materials and consuming manufactured goods. Thus, as transglobal networks of exchange supplanted self-sufficient, industrially indigenous economic seclusion, so the needs of the industrially advanced nations, with Britain in the vanguard, forcefully shaped the economies of those unable to resist economic, political, and/or military coercion. The creation of a world after industrial capitalism’s own image was one which, “on pain of extinction,” sucked “barbarian and semi-barbarian countries” into profoundly unequal relations of exchange (225).¹⁷ And one way of addressing the damage this imperialist process caused is to turn to food, or more pointedly, to the lack thereof.

In this regard, Mike Davis’s *Late Victorian Holocausts* analyses the way in which free trade economics, industrial capitalism, and climate combined in order to decimate tropical humanity and create the “third world.” As industrial capitalist powers increasingly opened up non-Europe through the second half of the nineteenth century, entire peoples and nations were rendered “famished peripheries,” (291) left defenceless against the droughts, famines, and pandemics precipitated by climatic events and the demands of metropolitan exploitation. Denied food as a result of their conscription into a London-centred world economy, and denied aid as a result of self-serving “Smithian dogma and cold-imperial interest,” (11)

millions – perhaps fifty million (7) – died across Asia, Africa, and South America in the twenty-five years that ended the century. In reflecting upon the decimation of large swathes of tropical humanity caused by policies which “were often the exact moral equivalents of bombs dropped from 18,000 feet,” (22) Davis reminds us of just how little European powers factored in the welfare of their non-European “brethren” to those strategies of de- and re-territorialisation which they pursued.¹⁸ Indeed, quite the opposite was true, since as peoples starved, so too the terrains they inhabited became increasingly easy to subsume within the new world order. Thus it was that “the great Victorian famines were forcing houses and accelerators of the very socio-economic forces that ensured their occurrence in the first place” (15). Emphasising this vicious symbiosis, and giving the lie to the idea that globalisation was distinguished by the interdependent feasting of “The Cookery of All Nations,” Davis cites one missionary who was told that Europeans “track famine like a sky full of vultures” (139).

In using the work of Mike Davis to conclude, it is not my intention to suggest that the wrongs of industrial capitalism were located solely in the non-Western world. Uneven development, whether at a local or global level, is inherent to the mode of production.¹⁹ The famine-ravaged Irish landscape of 1851 bore chilling testament to the fact that inequality, violence, and suffering is capitalism’s hallmark.²⁰ However, it is the case that Davis’s study chronicles an historical moment following the Great Exhibition which witnessed the exploitation and annihilation of those very inhabitants of the “great world” with which a good part of this essay has been concerned. And that the economic policies of metropolitan centres such as Victorian Britain actively promoted or were at least indifferent to this fact should not be divorced from the dismissive representation of non-European peoples at the display. Understood as markers of socio-economic (under-)development, barbarism and savagery meant unfulfilled economic potential. To the world’s greatest manufacturing powers, keen to import raw materials and export capital and manufactured commodities, this meant profit via penetration. Understood as markers of racialised human difference, barbarism and savagery meant that the (sub)human costs of this profit making enterprise could be dismissed. Although the Great Exhibition did not pave the way for the process of bourgeois expansion which marked the second half of the nineteenth century, it did help put in place social, political, and cultural foundations which would prove crucial to the discriminatory and devastating ways in which industrial capitalism took hold of the world. As Albert and his guests gorged themselves in the feasts leading up to the Great Exhibition, then, they celebrated a process distinguished by its capacity for the institutionalisation of mass inequality, hunger and extermination.

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NOTES

1. Cowen makes a similar point in her recent history, *Relish: The Extraordinary Life of Alexis Soyer, Victorian Celebrity Chef*. See her chapter on Soyer’s Symposium for an informed and interesting account of the venture (176–99).
2. The Victorian discourse of political economy sought to establish Economic Man as a universal figure, incorporating gender, class, and race, as well as geographical and historical spread. In fact, Economic

Man should be understood as a white middle-class man born in a particular time and place. See Gagnier 19.

3. Following Harvey’s observation that to identify “barbarians, savages and inferior peoples who had failed to mix their labour with their land” is to legitimise imperialist processes of “accumulation by dispossession” (45), I would stress that this human hierarchy can be understood with relation to a raft of imperial policies, from formal colonial annexation to informal “gunboat” imperialism. So if the years following the Great Exhibition witnessed the “scramble for Africa” and the switch in India from corporate colonialism to direct rule, so too they saw, for example, Britain carving “out an area of competitive advantage based largely on trade and economic policy” in Latin America (Aguirre xv). As becomes clear towards the end of the essay, I am interested in broad terms in the way in which industrial capitalism created and enforced dependency in the non-European world.

4. If every just man that now pines with want
 Had but a moderate and beseeming share
 Of that which lewdly-pamper’d luxury
 Now heeps upon som few with vast excess,
 Nature’s full blessings would be well dispenc’t
 In unsuperfluous even proportion. (Milton 46; ll.768–73)

5. See Auerbach 22–23.
6. For a brief summary of mid-nineteenth century policy in Europe and America regarding free trade, see Foreman-Peck 55–61.
7. This emphasis must be set against Gagnier’s definition of late-Victorian Economic Man in terms of his subjective, insatiable wants (4).
8. Smith also acknowledged, however, that humankind aspired to more than the fulfilment of such basic wants; set against the desire for food, which was limited “by the narrow capacity of the human stomach,” Smith noted the “altogether endless” desires which took over once the appetite was sated (269).
9. In *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England*, Richards frames the Great Exhibition in contradistinction to a Smithian understanding of exchange, reading the event in line with Walter Benjamin’s observation that “World exhibitions are sites of pilgrimages to the commodity fetish” (151) and Guy Debord’s work on spectacle as the capitalist mode of representation. This essay traces not the overturn, but the persistency of the Smithian conceptualisation of the commodity as, in Richards’s terms, an “essentially neutral,” “colourless” medium of exchange (66).
10. John Davis estimates that during the six months the Exhibition was open, 58,000 non-Britons arrived in the country, almost all of them from Europe. This stood in contrast with an annual average of around 21,500 visits from foreigners in the three years prior to 1851 (177).
11. The gender specificity is the result of the fact that I have not been able to trace any representations of women and food.
12. In line with this analysis, Stocking contends that “the most obvious lesson of the Exhibition . . . was that in pursuing their sacred mission, not all men had advanced at the same pace, or arrived at the same point” (3). This feeds into his argument that for nineteenth-century thought, the free trade arena “in which the pursuit of individual advantage operated automatically for the good of all was quite explicitly the ‘universal society of nations throughout the civilized world’” (32). I agree with Stocking that the Great Exhibition made racialised human difference manifest, but complicating the object lesson which Stocking associates with the display is the fact that the event’s new world order was so often couched in genuinely global terms, refusing the idea of civilisation as a prerequisite for free trade.
13. As far as I have been able to ascertain, it was this cartoon which first featured the idea of *cold* missionary.
14. Significantly, international exhibitions held from 1889 across the world did include the display of peoples, especially “primitive” peoples (Greenhalgh 82). For a discussion of the way in which culinary

- culture could be represented in order to justify colonial intervention, see Norcia. The thrust of Norcia's argument is somewhat different to my own, but she illuminates a similar bind between culinary representation, human hierarchy, and the exertion of imperial/metropolitan power.
15. See the Marxist.org Internet Archive for the full text from which this and subsequent quotations are drawn.
 16. In a letter to Engels written after the close of the Exhibition and dated 24 January 1852, Marx poured scorn on the "cosmopolitan-philanthropic-commercial hymns of peace" which the event had promulgated.
 17. As I suggest, the use here of the civilised-barbarian antithesis is far more than an ironic deployment of bourgeois rhetoric. Following Hegel's Eurocentric thinking on global historical progress in particular, Marx took up the position of recognising the brutality of industrial capitalist expansion in non-Europe, but nevertheless condoned this expansion as a means of realising a socialist destiny.
 18. Attempting as he does to dismiss scholarly interest in these human disasters as "fashionable," even the imperial apologist Ferguson bemoans the fact that more was not done by the British to avert these famines (188).
 19. Pomeranz notes that geographic generalisations such as "western Europe" are problematic when discussing economic development, suggesting as they do a uniform experience of capitalist progress. He cites Ireland, southern Italy, and most of Iberia as terrains "which did not have much of the economic development usually held to be characteristically European or western European" (3).
 20. Underscoring the point that historians should not be beguiled into thinking that *laissez-faire* economics do not involve the calculated and callous exertion of power, Davis draws explicit parallels between the Irish Famine of 1845–51 and the famines his book documents. For a more detailed overview of the Irish Famine and the contemporary debates it has provoked amongst historians, see Brantlinger. Brantlinger makes clear a link between "racist and religious stereotyping" of the Irish, and the lack of effective British intervention to aid the effects of the famine (see especially 198–99).

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